

Dear Billy Hargrove by ThisIsNotHowIDie

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Summary:

Billy sits on the railing and swings his legs around so they are hanging over the edge. His hands gripping the top rail. All that's left to do is fling himself off.

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Or, after Billy leaves a letter saying he's going to kill himself, Neil moves them out to Hawkins where Billy pays Steve Harrington to pretend to be his friend so that they don't think he's still suicidal.

1. A Long Way Down

Billy stared at the letter laid flat on his desk while tapping his pencil between his fingers. This was stupid. It was without a doubt in his mind, the world's worst suicide note. It wasn't even addressed to anyone. The only person he could think would even remotely care that he was about to throw himself off a cliff was himself. Plus it's not like he even really wanted to leave a note for anyone in his life. He didn't owe them anything. The only reason he was doing this was that he didn't want his fucking corpse to be dragged off by a coyote or something.

He groaned and put his pencil down rubbing his hands over his face. He was so pathetic, who didn't have a single person in their life to say goodbye to? But then again that's why he was doing this, no one gave a shit about him. His mom left, his dad thinks he's pathetic, he doesn't have any real friends, Susan and Max would be happier without him in the picture. He wasn't going to talk himself out of this. He already had three notes just like this one, shoved at the bottom of his waste bin, where no one would look. A small hope that maybe tomorrow would be better. That maybe he would wake up and that ball of anger wouldn't be sitting so heavy on his chest. That his mom would call and tell him she loves him, or just talk to him, allow him to listen to her voice even if it's just one more time. That his dad would stop hitting him around. Stop calling him pathetic and a fag, stop reminding him that he is going to die alone because if a boy's own mother won't stick around then he really must be unlovable. That maybe, just maybe Max would take a break from calling him a dick. That she would grow up and realized that after five years of sharing this shithole family, she had grown on him. He doesn't want to be the asshole everyone tells him he is, even if it's just to one person. That they could be in this together.

But every time he allowed himself just that small amount of hope, it would get squashed. Experience had proven to him that he was just as bad as everyone told him he was. If by 17 he hadn't figured out how to have one positive trait, he never would. Besides everyone always said at the rate he was going he was bound to die young. Might as well control the circumstances over which it happens.

He lifts his hands from his face and rereads the letter once more checking for any spelling mistakes. A voice at the back of his head tells him he's stalling. As if a typo is what stands between him and death. Cause the most humiliating part of his suicide would be if he mixed up a b for a d or used the wrong tense.

Dear Billy Hargrove,

I think Billy would look better on a headstone than William. Always hated that name, makes me sound like I'm a 50-year-old accountant or something. Doesn't really matter, I'll be dead. What do I care what's on my headstone or if I even have one for that matter. If they do decide to cremate me I hope someone has the decency to throw my ashes into the sea. I think I'd kill myself all over again if I had to spend eternity on my Dad's mantle place. Or maybe Dad would give my ashes to my mom. If she even showed up to the funeral. Bet she would, everyone always gets all decent when it comes to the dead. (Dad if you read this Please make sure Mom comes to my funeral.)

This isn't the part where I get all sentimental or all 'woe is me.' I'm not fucking depressed. I don't want to stay in bed all day or cut myself or stop showering. It's just not worth being alive anymore. What do I have to show for it? Some bruises? Great hair? It's easier to just die.

Anyway if you're reading this it means I actually went through with it. You can find my body at the bottom of Hollow Bridge.

Sincerely, the only person who gives a shit about you (Or not, you Don't usually give a shit about the people you kill),
Me

P.s. Max You aren't allowed to have any of my shit

It's simple. More a ramble of thoughts than a letter but it gets the job done. All the important bits are there. He's dead, he did it himself and this is where to find his body. Billy pushes himself back from his desk and stands, picking up the letter and walking over to his bed to place it gently on his pillow. The bed is made and the room is clean, specifically with the purpose of someone finding the letter easily. He has no doubt Maxine will snoop through his stuff the second she realizes he's not home but he can't take any risks. God forbid the

letter falls to the floor and gets swept under his bed.

Billy takes one more deep breath, grabs his keys, and heads out the door, ignoring the way his heart was rushing. The bridge isn't that far from his house. When he picked it, he figured he wouldn't want the extra time to sit with his thoughts. Now that he's actually going through with it, he wished the distance was further. A short commute to his ultimate demise. The radio isn't on. Billy figured it would be weird to play music he likes, but he also doesn't want to spend his last moments listening to some lame top hits radio.

When he does reach the bridge he lets the car idle on the side of the road while he stares out the windshield. So this is it. It all feels so undramatic. Like maybe it should start raining, or sad music should well up in the background. At the very least he should be crying right? Don't people usually cry when they are about to kill themselves? He turns off the car and walks over to the bridge. It has a safety rail but everyone knows it's not actually enough to do anything. Since Billy was a kid, a car has flipped over the side and three people have flung themselves off of it. Soon to be four. Will his death make the paper?

Billy sits on the railing and swings his legs around so they are hanging over the edge. His hands gripping the top rail. All that's left to do is fling himself off. He looks down. The ground looks so far away. Like really far. It looks so much further than the last time he scouted this place out. No. NO. He had to stop syncing himself out. He was going to do this. It was too late not to do this. He had written the letter, had driven here. He was doing this.

He still didn't move. Hands gripping the railing till they turned white.

He looked over his shoulder, down the road. Maybe a car would drive by. They would stop short and yell at him to quit being an idiot and stop fucking around. What was he trying to do, get himself killed? Or maybe they would get out and ask him what was wrong. More likely he would probably just throw himself off to avoid the embarrassment of it all. He looked back down.

Would it hurt?

What if he didn't die right away?

Would his mom break down when she heard the news?

What would his dad do with his room? Leave it as a shrine? Get rid of all his stuff?

Would Max cry?

Would anyone cry?

What about his car?

Is there an afterlife?

Billy falls backward, landing with an 'oof' as his back hits the hard cement under him. It's a short fall. He can't catch his breath. Before his brain catches up with his feet, he is running to his car and peeling away from the bridge. It's only after the crude yellow paint of Hollow Bridge is out of his rearview mirror that he can breathe.

Next time. Next time.

This is the closest he's ever gotten so next time he will do it. He won't think. He won't look down; he'll just jump.

Police cars. That's the first thing Billy notices when he pulls onto his street. There are three squad cars parked in front of his house. He doesn't want to go in, because there is no way that is a good sign. But he's tired, he wants to shower and go to bed. So he parks the car, puts on his best 'indifference' face, and decides to play dumb. Tell them it was some school assignment. That they had to pretend to be Holden Caulfield or some bullshit.

Billy strolls in through the front door to find an officer sitting with a teary-eyed Max and Susan, another standing off to the side with his father, and four more standing around. He feels his stomach drop. "What's going on?"

"Billy!" Max yells and jumps up from the couch running over to him.

He stumbles back with the force of her arms wrapping around him. What the hell?

The officer next to his dad looks at Neil. "This is your son?"

"Yes, officer." Billy can't help but notice that Neil's voice sounds raw. Probably from screaming about what a disgrace his son was.

The officer nods and turns to face Billy. "I'm gonna need to ask you a few questions son."

"What is this about?" Billy was still playing dumb.

"I think you know what this is about." He said not buying Billy's bullshit for a second. Billy hesitates before giving a quick nod and starts to peel Max's arms off from around him. He's surprised to see a wet spot at the front of his shirt where her face was pressed.

Everything around Billy happens in a blur. His ears are ringing as he tries to think of excuses. Tries to come up with ways to get out of this. What probably takes a few minutes at most feels like hours. Neil thanks the other officers and the shuffle out. Susan keeps offering the cop that wants to talk to Billy coffee. Max is sent to her room. The next thing Billy knows is he's in the kitchen sitting with Officer Paul. Billy's letter is on the kitchen table between them.

"Your sister found this on your pillow." Officer Paul tells him, sliding the letter closer to Billy. As if Billy doesn't know exactly what it is.

"It's a homework assignment." He lies, looking at the floor.

"Your teachers made you write a suicide note?"

He shrugged "Public school."

The officer sighed leaning back in his seat "Now look son, I have been on the force a long time, I know when someone is bullshitting me."

Billy shrugged again, picking some dirt out from under his fingernails. "I didn't do anything."

Officer Paul tapped his fingers on the table “Mmmm.” He leaned forward. “There is a part of your letter I’m interested in.” Billy glanced up as the officer slid the paper over, pointing to a line on it. “Wanna tell me what you mean by bruises?”

“I get in a lot of fights.”

“Fights? At home?”

Billy tenses up. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“You’re father, I spoke to him. He seems like a bit of a hardass. Maybe the type of guy who likes to drive a lesson home with a punch?”

Billy pursed his lips. “My dad doesn’t beat me.” The last thing he needed right now was Neil thinking Billy was a snitch. The cop makes a sound like he doesn’t believe him. For some reason that is what sends Billy over the edge. Embarrassment replaced by rage. Who does this guy think he is? “You think you’re so clever with your reading skills, but last I checked there were five cops here and no one at Hollows Bridge. Where I fucking said I would be.”

Officer Paul, looks at him. “Thought this letter was just bullshit? You’re telling me you were going to do it?”

Billy crosses his arms, trying not to ball his hands into fists. “I’m not telling you shit.”

He stands up. “Well, I can’t make you talk but, if you decide you want help,” He took a pen out of his pocket and scribbled a number onto the back of Billy’s note. “You give me a call.” Billy just frowns, no way he’s doing that. “You have a goodnight now,” Paul says and heads to leave.

Billy looks at the number he left, before grabbing the paper, crumpling it up, and throwing it in the trash. He just wants to sleep. When he walks into his bedroom to find his father waiting for him, Billy knows that won’t be an option.

2. Games of Thrones

Billy dropped a box onto the floor of his new room, looking around. It was bigger than his old one, and this one still had a door. After his stunt with the bridge, Neil had told Billy that he didn't deserve privacy and had taken his door off the hinges. He hadn't put it back on till the moving truck was heading towards Indiana. Billy really hopes that Neil doesn't take this door. He misses the little things like being able to change in his room, think out loud, dance to his music, masturbate. He wasn't sure what lesson Neil had been trying to teach him but all Billy had gotten out of the experience was that life truly was a miserable hellscape and no one gave a shit about him. The missing door was the only indication that anything had happened. They didn't talk about it, didn't acknowledge it, didn't drag him to the hospital or to a therapist, didn't pump him full of pills.

Not that he wanted that.

Billy gives the room one more once over and thinks he was wrong. There is one more indicator that something happened. This house. Indiana. Leaving California behind. Neil kept giving them big speeches about how Indiana would be a fresh start. That it would be good for the family. They all knew it was bullshit though. The only reason they moved here was because Neil intended on giving Billy a reason to be miserable. Why else would he choose a landlocked state miles away from anything or anyone Billy had ever known. The year before he graduates no less. There was nowhere for Billy to run off too in Hawkins. No secret hideaways or spots to clear his mind. Nowhere for him to have any privacy in a small town. In its own way, Hawkins was just one big missing bedroom door.

He should have just jumped.

“Billy?”

He turns to see Max standing in his doorway wearing the same ridiculous outfit she wore all through the three day drive down here. Sweatpants- this pair a bright pink, which is just as ridiculous as the lime and orange pairs she had worn the last few days. Seriously when did she even buy these, he's never seen them before this trip. A Metallica sweatshirt she must have stolen out of his closet when he wasn't looking. One that had been a little big on him so she was absolutely swimming in it. The bottom falling just above her knees, and he hasn't been able to see her hands since she put it on. A pair of her mom's knock-off Birkenstocks (Which again why?) all topped off with the world's messiest bun on top of her head. It was like she was channeling her inner homeless man energy.

“What do you want?” He asked.

“Mom says she'll order pizza if we go get it.”

He is hungry. “You're gonna go pick up pizza looking like that?” Truckstop diners were one thing but going out in public in that? When she would have to see these people again? No way.

Max looked down at her outfit. “What's wrong with it? I'm comfortable.”

“A little too comfortable.”

“Sorry not all of us want to wear tight jeans and button-downs for 20-hour car rides.”

“We aren’t in the car now.”

She groaned “Will you pick up the pizza or not?”

“I’m not going into public with you looking like that.”

“I’ll stay in the car.”

“Hmm.”

“Billy!”

“Fine. But only because I’m hungry.” She grinned and ran off, supposedly to tell her mom the good news.

Billy walked outside to the moving truck. His dad was standing there, arms crossed as he looked at the contents of the truck. Only looking over when he heard the front door swing closed.

“Billy good, get over here and help me take this dresser inside.”

“Yes sir.” He tried not to sound too exasperated about it. He’s just so tired of moving. It’s not an attitude.

“Drop the attitude,” Neil says anyway. “You want to be grounded already?”

“No. Sorry Sir,” He bounds down the steps and across the lawn over to the truck. “I’m just tired.” He tries to explain.

“We are all tired.” Neil says “That is not an excuse to give me an attitude.” Billy climbs into the back of the U-haul. “Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes sir.” He started to tip the dresser back so that Neil could take half of it. “Where is this going?”

“Mine and Susan's room,” Neil says like Billy should know that. Like he memorized every piece of furniture in their house. He helps him carry the dresser inside, his muscles straining under the weight. He isn’t weak by any means, but lugging furniture around is a lot different from weight lifting. Finally, they were putting the dresser down in the master bedroom, no doubt in a spot it would be moved from for the sake of design. But for tonight this is where it would stay.

Neil blocks Billy’s way before he can leave. “We need to have a conversation.” He states closing the door. Well, that’s never a good sign.

“Okay?” He doesn’t know what this is about. Sure he’s been a little angrier than usual, more likely to make a snap remark, but he thinks given the circumstances that’s fair. It’s not like Max has been the picture-perfect child since the move was announced.

“I want to make it very clear to you,” Neil cracks the knuckles in his right hand and then the left. “That there will be no repeats to the stunt you pulled in California.”

He knew it, he knew that’s why they moved here. “I wasn’t gonna do it...” Billy muttered.

Neil gives him a shove back and Billy stumbles knocking into the dresser. “None of your excuses. I don’t care why you wrote that letter. You terrified your sister and Susan. Is that any way to be a respectful brother and son?”

He licked his lips, fighting to stuff his reply down his throat.

“You will be nothing but the picture of respect and responsibility am I clear?”

“Yes sir.” He grits out.

“Clearly I gave you too much freedom in California if you were able to get hippie ideas in your head like suicide. Who knows what other ideas slithered into that thick skull of yours.” Neil gives him a once over and Billy knows what he’s thinking. He’s never been quiet about

the fact that he thinks the way Billy's dresses is too feminine. Constantly tells him that one day someone is gonna mistake him for a girl. Or worse yet people are going to start talking. Neil wouldn't have people thinking he raised a queer.

"No ideas sir."

"Are you sassing me?"

Billy wants to scream. What does Neil want? Is there a correct way to answer him? Is he always gonna get it wrong? Billy knows he's a burden okay, he knows that.

"Billy!" Max's call cuts through whatever might have happened next. "Billy where are you!? Let's go get the pizza!"

Neil takes a step back and opens the bedroom door. "He's coming, Billy was just helping me move the dresser." He turns back to Billy "Go on, pick up the food with your sister."

Billy gives a curt nod and heads out into the hallway. Max is standing there, holding his keys in one hand. She must have caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror because she has replaced her sweatpants with a pair of jeans. She's still sporting a messy bun and his sweatshirt though. He waits for his dad to disappear back into his room before stomping towards Max and grabbing the keys from her hands. "Let's just get this over with."

He just barely catches Max rolling her eyes at him as he storms past her and out the door. Briefly regretting walking ahead of Max simply because he misses the opportunity to slam the front door closed.

“What crawled up your butt?” Max snaps at him as she slams his car door closed. Bitch.

Billy ignores her in favor of pulling a cigarette from the pack in his pocket. It takes him six times to get the lighter to actually light, and when he finally does he takes a long drag, trying to calm himself. Fuck his dad. Fuck this town. Fuck Max and her stupid snooping.

“Those things don’t make you look half as cool as you think they do.” Max crossed her arms.

“Jesus shut the fuck up Maxine!” Billy snapped at her, flooring the car in reverse. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he knows he shouldn’t be so reckless, but he can’t find it in him to give a shit about that little voice.

“God! Why do you have to be an ass all of the time!?” Max shot back just as venomously.

“Like anyone could be in a pleasant mood living with a bitch like you!” He starts to fiddle with the radio, there has to be one good station in this damn town.

Max throws her middle finger in his face and he grits his teeth, using

all his self-control to not break her finger.

They couldn't start school right away, which meant Billy was stuck at home that first week. Moving furniture, unpacking what seemed to be an endless supply of boxes, and playing chauffeur to Maxine. The only saving grace of it all was that Neil did start work right away. Big bad Hawkins in desperate need of a security guard at the one and only bank in the whole town. Susan was supposed to start after they got settled, but someone quit so she went back to her job as a teller quickly. So sure he was stuck with his only company being Max, but it could be worse. It could be Neil breathing down his neck.

Still, Billy had never been good at being on his own. He was an extroverted person, he did better when he was surrounded by people. When he didn't have time to sit in his head. So despite not being a fan of school his first day at Hawkins High was a saving grace. Especially after Billy realized that everyone in this town was so desperate for something new that they latched onto him like flies to honey. Back in California Billy had never been particularly popular, not even within his own little clique. He was rude and brash and quick to anger, which could be fun at parties but not exactly a personality people wanted to hang around with for prolonged periods of time. Here though, he was new and exotic and something that people wanted to figure out. It wasn't hard to rise through the ranks, and Billy was absolutely addicted.

So when he heard about Steve Harrington, about the boy who might come to reclaim his crown Billy went a little overboard. Sure, Tommy H. swore up and down that Steve was pussy whipped and didn't want his crown back, but Billy didn't believe that. Couldn't believe that. How could anyone willingly give up this feeling?

Billy gets his first real taste of King Steve at a Halloween party. Halloween had snuck up on him. If he's completely honest, he hadn't even known what day of the week it was since the move. So when some girl smiled at him and handed over an orange flyer that day in school, he had only winked and promised her a dance. A party was exactly what he needed. It was perfect. He could flirt, get some numbers, get drunk, and most importantly get out of the house. He had to bribe Max with \$5 to not tell her mom or Neil that he hadn't taken her trick or treating. Something he was very pissed off about, especially after their little fight after school. (Seriously, who the fuck was she to blame him for the move. She was the one who couldn't keep from going through her stuff for one fucking hour.) But it was worth it. Halloween was his time to shine.

By the time Billy spots Harrington, the party is well underway and Billy himself is decently faded. The weed in Hawkins is better than he thought it would be. Guess these hicks don't have much else to do other than perfect their product. The beer is cheap, but the cheaper the alcohol the faster it gets you drunk. (He's feeling pretty good. Even if his vision is a bit fuzzy.) When he spots Steve he doesn't even need confirmation that the asshole Tom Cruise wanna be, with giant hair was the fallen king everyone was telling him about. He just knew, the second he saw him across that crowded room. He had planned on playing it cool, ignore him, and show the newly dethroned that he wasn't worth a second of Billy's time. Instead, he was pulled in, like some kind of gravitational force was compelling him over. Eyes locked on his target. People, furniture, it didn't matter, nothing was slowing him down.

Steve to his credit didn't so much as hesitate when Billy approached him. Maybe Billy was a little flattered. Steve knew who he was. Was threatened by him. He didn't miss the clench of the jaw, the way his fingers curled a little to tight around those stupid sunglasses. Vaguely Billy could hear Tommy bragging for him. Going on about Billy setting a new keg stand record. (It wasn't that hard, faster you drink,

faster you get drunk, if anything keg stands just made things more efficient.)

“Man whatever.” Harrington laughed. Actually laughed, in their fucking faces. It made Billy’s skin crawl. “I got more important things going on than a stupid keg stand.”

It was Billy’s turn to laugh. A little too loud, just on the verge of unhinged. It bubbled out of him without his permission. Heat blossoming out from his chest like a little explosion. Spreading a fire under his skin. “Think you’re hot shit, Harrington?” He sneered. “What cause you got a little girlfriend? News flash buddy,” He leaned in close, jutting his thumb in the direction the skinny brunette he had come in with ran off in. “she’s already found something better to do.”

Harrington's head snaps to the side, so fast Billy almost expects it to break. He watches as Harrington purses his lips, eyes scanning the crowd in the direction his girlfriend had run off. What was her name again? Nikki? Nelly? Something like that.

Tommy cackles next to him. “Probably off to go ride Jonathan's dick huh Harrington?” Billy’s ears perk up at that, he is going to have to get the scoop on this Jonathan guy later.

Steve turns his head back to them, glares at Tommy H. with such a passion that if Billy had doubted they used to be friends before he definitely didn’t anymore. “Nah.” Steve smiles and looks at Billy, eyes scanning down his body. Billy suddenly feels the urge to pull his jacket closed and keep his arms crossed tightly over his chest. Harrington’s eyes scan back up meeting Billy’s. “She just didn’t want to stare at your ugly mug.”

Billy is shocked into silence. If there was one thing he knew it was that he wasn't ugly. He had made a name for himself over not being ugly. He looked like his mother. He wasn't ugly. By the time he opened his mouth to respond Steve was already walking away and Tommy is clapping a hand on his back telling him not to worry about it, they'll get him next time.

Billy needs a drink, a smoke, and a girl in his lap.

It's 10:45 and Billy is in the kitchen, chugging a gallon bottle of water. He needs to sober up and fast. How his dumb ass could forget his curfew is at 11, is beyond him, all he knows is he can't drive home when he is this far gone. Plus he still has to pick up Max, who better be in the meeting place they agreed on. He finishes the water and tosses the container over his shoulder before rummaging through the cabinets. Bread, he needs bread. Something to soak up all this alcohol.

He finds a loaf and tears the bag open with his teeth ignoring the zip tie altogether. He pulls out two slices and starts eating them. Moaning at the taste, god he was hungry.

"Get off." Billy hears someone slur behind him. He closes his eyes, takes a deep breath. He better not have to kick some guy's ass for trying to feel up a drunk chick. He turns around to find that the drunk chick is Harrington's girlfriend and the person she's arguing with Steve. Who is trying to stop her from filling her cup. Normally Billy would chime in with some remark to let the girl drink if she wanted. But this was a rare instance where it didn't seem like the boyfriend was playing parent number three. This bitch was drunk,

and coming from him that was saying something.

He chimes in with the rest of the crowd as red liquid splashes all over the princess's white shirt. Even from 6 feet away Billy can feel the accusation Nancy's glare is burning into Steve. Cause clearly none of this was her fault. It was good to know the love birds were in paradise. He laughs to himself and grabs another piece of bread watching as Harrington chases after his girlfriend like a dog with a tail between its legs.

Pussy whipped indeed. He wishes he could stick around to watch the rest of that shit show, but he really needs to get home, if he doesn't want Neil to kill him. He pushes his way through the party to the front door and starts off down the long drive to his car. He's patting down his pockets for his keys when he hears someone else heading away from the party. He turns to see Harrington walking towards his own car, head bowed and hand rubbing at the bridge between his eyes (Billy knows that move a little too well. Keep the tears locked away as long as you can). He was walking with purpose, drunk bitch nowhere in sight. He's curious about what she could have said in that short amount of time that has Harrington close to tears. Part of him wants to scream out and ask. Instead, he stays still watching as the BMW peeled off down the street.

Well, it looks like the power couple was all broken up. With no girl holding him down, Steve was sure to come back for his crown. Billy laughed into the night sky.

Let the games begin.

3. Roll With the Punches

Notes for the Chapter:

First time writing from Max's perspective, let me know what you think!

Max isn't stupid. She's not a straight-A student or anything but she's not stupid. She isn't blind or deaf either. She knows about Neil. Knows that the bruises Billy often wears aren't from fights at school. She knows Billy isn't a happy person. She just didn't know exactly how unhappy he was until she found that letter sitting on his pillow. The feeling from that day never really left her. Max can't really explain it, as worried as she was, that letter, it sparked some kind of anger in her that hasn't subsided.

When Billy came home, alive, not a scratch on him, she thought things would change. The sinking feeling, the horror that she would never see her brother again, was bound to bring them closer together. But instead of that happening she just got mad when she looked at him. A fiery white, vomit-inducing rage. The kind that burned your lungs and the back of your eyes.

She wanted to know why he left the letter for her to find.

Did he hate her that much? Enough to leave it up to a thirteen-year-old to break the news that he was dead? In the nights following the incident, she kept waking up in a cold sweat scared that she had dreamed of him coming home. She was thankful that Neil took his door off the hinges. It made it so she could sneak past his room and confirm that he was there. Safe. Alive.

She wants to kill him herself.

A monologue, a rant, a soliloquy of words has been sitting at the tip of her tongue. Instead, she can barely look him in the eye. He's like a walking corpse. He might have come back home with a heartbeat but each day he seems to become less and less like the Billy she knows.

Max gently nudged Billy with her foot. Admittedly she had not

thought through jamming the needle into his neck. It had been in the heat of the moment. She hadn't expected him to still be passed out when they got back from their field trip to the upside-down.

"He's still breathing right?" Max is surprised to find that it's Steve asking the question. After what Billy did to his face she figured he wouldn't care one way or the other if Billy was alive. The others clearly didn't; they were in the kitchen making post-victory snacks and waiting for Eleven to return.

"I think so..." She nudged him with her foot again and he groaned. "Yeah, he's breathing."

"Well... good," Steve said. "The last thing Mrs. Byers needs is a dead body in her living room." He hesitates a second. "Thanks for um... you know."

Max nodded. "Thanks for standing up to him."

"Is he always so..." Steve gestured vaguely at Billy.

Max looks down at him and chews her lip. She thinks about the Billy she used to know. The one who wasn't so angry all the time. Or if he was he was better at hiding it from the world. The one who taught her how to balance on a skateboard and sneak into a movie theater. The one who used to steal food off her plate at dinner and cave when she asked (begged) him to braid her hair. He hasn't been that Billy for a long time. "Yeah, he's always the worst."

"Throw a bucket of water on him." Steve suggested, "That ought to wake him up."

Max laughed, as much pleasure as that visual gave her she really didn't want to give Billy anymore cause to be angry with her. The ride home was going to be awkward enough already. "I think I should probably call home. Let my mom know I'm alright."

Steve nodded. "Go ahead, hopefully, Hopper will be back soon, if he's still not awake by then, one of us can give you a ride home."

"Thanks, Steve."

As Max went to make the phone call, Lucas caught her eye, offering a small wave and a shy smile. She did her best not to blush, and instead of waving back she just rolled her eyes at him, taking the phone off the receiver. She really liked him, he was sweet and cute and it was embarrassing how her stomach filled with butterflies when he looked at her. She dialed her house phone and waited for someone to pick up.

"Hargrove Residence." Neil's voice said on the other end after the second ring. Max resisted the urge to groan.

"It's Max."

"Maxine. Where are you, me and your mother are worried sick."

"I um, I went to a friend's house. I lost track of time."

"Whose house are you at?"

"Just a friend." She said quickly. "I'm sorry I didn't mean to stay out so late."

"Max." Max jumped turning around to find Billy standing behind her. He looked like the walking dead.

"Where is your brother? I sent him out looking for you hours ago."

Before Max could answer either of them, Billy took the phone from her hand and put it to his ear. "Hey it's... yes I know what time... I got a flat tire when I was looking for her. ... I didn't have a spare I had to walk to a- no sir. ... Yes sir. ...Yes sir." Max watched as Billy's grip on the phone tightened. "Yes Sir. I'm taking her home now. ... I won't." He hung up the phone.

It was only then that Max realized the house had gone silent. She looked over to find the boys watching her and Billy. Dustin was holding a frying pan in his hand like a weapon. "It's fine," Max promised them. "I'll see you guys in school Monday."

"You have my number," Lucas said, his eyes glued on Billy. "Call if you need me."

To her surprise, Billy didn't rise to the bait. "Come on Max." He said pushing past her and out the front door.

4. The Mighty Fall

Billy groaned as he felt something nudge his ribs. He felt both a million miles away and hyper-aware of every molecule in his body. He hurt. Everything was stiff and sore. What happened? He ran his hand over the surface he was laying on. Hardwood. Was he on the floor?

“... Standing up to him.” The voice sounded like it was underwater. That didn’t make any sense. He tried to focus his thoughts and remember what happened.

“Is he always so...” Billy’s breathing stopped. Harrington. It all came rushing back to him, Max running away, Harrington lying to his face, the fight, Max- did she drug him? Why did she even have drugs? What the hell were these freaks doing here? He wanted to lunge back up and start swinging at Harringtons’ stupid face again. But if his stiff muscles weren’t enough to keep him on the floor the memory of Max swinging a nail bat between his legs was.

What the hell was going on?

“Yeah, he’s always the worst.” he heard Max respond.

The worst? He’s the worst? She’s the one who ran off, she’s the one who wouldn’t listen to him. If anyone was the worst it was Max. He tried to will himself to get up, but even his eyelids weighed 100 pounds.

“... probably call home. Let my mom know I’m alright.”

Shit. Home. Neil. Fuck.

He needed to get up. It took every ounce of strength he had but he pried his eyes open. Where he expected to be greeted with the sight of your average everyday wall, maybe a picture of two, he was instead greeted by multiple crayon drawings taped to the walls. What. The. Fuck. Did Max join a cult or something? Only Max could join a cult after leaving California.

He groaned loudly as he forced himself into an upright position. It was then that he noticed Harrington was still in the room with him. Watching. Sure his eyes were almost swollen shut but he was definitely staring right at Billy. Billy felt himself blush. Which in turn made him angry. Steve was the one with the fucked up face but Billy was embarrassed, fuck that.

“Fuck are you looking at Harrington?” Billy snapped, blushing more as the older boy watched him struggle to get into a standing position.

“Sorry,” Harrington said, crossing his arms. “It’s just not every day you get to see the garbage take itself out.”

Billy clenched his jaw. “Fuck you, Harrington.” He moved to shove him but Steve just took a simple step back and held up his finger-wagging it like he was scolding a child.

“Uh, uh, uh, you wouldn’t want Max to hear you, she’s still got that bat you know.”

“Having a thirteen-year-old fight your battles, Harrington?” He sneered as best as he could. Standing up had created a massive headache to form behind his eyes and at the base of his neck.

“She could take you.” Harrington shrugged.

Billy felt his hands clench into fists by his side, but instead of responding, he turned on his heel. This wasn’t worth the trouble. He had to get Max home before Neil really decided to kill him. He was almost out of the room when Harrington spoke again.

“Oh and Billy, just know, if I hear you gave Max and rough time... the bat belongs to me. And I know how to use it.”

Billy gritted his teeth and walked into the kitchen and right over to Max, who was already on the phone. “Max.” He said annoyed, she had never been good at lying on the spot. So he grabbed the phone from her hand before she could mess this night up any more than she already had.

“Hey it’s-”

"Where the hell have you been?" Neil cut Billy off. "Do you have any idea what time it is?"

"Yes, I know what time-"

"I told you, you were to look for your sister, this is not a big town so if I learn that you went on that date-" Billy tried to think of an excuse as Neil rambled on.

"I got a flat tire when I was looking for her." that made sense. They had just driven halfway across the country and his tires were bound to be worn.

"I know I didn't raise a pussy who doesn't know how to change a tire, you still have hours of time to account for."

"I didn't have a spare I had to walk to a-"

"Are you talking back to me?"

Billy bit his lip. "No sir."

"Good. Now get your sister and get your ass home."

"Yes sir."

"And when you do me and you are going to have a little conversation about how irresponsible you have been acting."

Billy's grip on the phone tightened. "Yes sir."

"I have work in the morning so you better not make me wait longer than I already have."

"Yes Sir. I'm taking her home now."

"Do not take too long," Neil warned one last time. Billy can practically already feel the punch to the face he's getting.

"I won't." He hung up the phone and looked at Max, he wanted to strangle her. Her eyes flicked from him over to her little gaggle of nerds. Billy followed her line of sight and saw them all staring at the

pair of them. One was holding a frying pan like a weapon.

"It's fine," Max said and Billy wanted to laugh. He's the one who's going to get a beating for this and as usual, the only one anyone is worried about is Max. "I'll see you guys in school Monday."

Sinclair spoke up first, making eye contact with Billy as he did. The kid either had a lot of balls or no sense to him at all. "You have my number. Call if you need me."

Billy allowed himself the brief fantasy of killing Sinclair but otherwise refused to react. "Come on Max." He said pushing past her and out the front door. He's halfway across the lawn before it dawns on him that his car is not where he left it. His hand flies to his pockets patting them down only to find them empty. "Max." Billy says through gritted teeth "Where are my keys?"

"Oh." he watches as she reaches into her own pocket and pulls his keys out. "Here."

"Why. Do. You. Have. My. Keys." He speaks slowly because if he doesn't he will scream.

"We needed to use the car."

"YOU DROVE MY CAR!?" He screamed, that was the final straw.

"WE NEEDED IT!" She yelled right back at him.

"You are so full of shit!" He wanted to snap her neck as he ripped the keys from her hand. "Why would you need my car huh! You got fucking Harrington's car right there!"

"He was passed out. Thanks to you." she huffed and headed towards the Camaro.

He marched after her. "I swear if anything is wrong with my baby I'll kill you." He yanked the driver's door open to find his seat pushed further back than normal. He sat down, angrily adjusting it back into place.

Max plopped into the passenger's seat, crossing her arms. "I'm not

scared of you.”

Billy turned the car on. “You know something Max you are a real bitch. My life would be so much fucking better if you didn't exist.” he makes a u-turn across the grass up towards the street.

“Yeah well so would mine!” Max yelled at him. “I wish you had just killed yourself!”

The car goes quiet and Billy waits for her to take it back. Half expected her to slap a hand over her mouth after she said it. To start apologizing right away. Instead, the clock on his dashboard counts down another minute and he breaks the silence.

“Yeah. So do I.”

5. Chapter 5

Max got a slap on the wrist and Billy got grounded till college. His keys got taken away and a laundry list of chores was added to his daily routine. It would be a flat out lie to say he wasn't bitter.

He did his best to keep up appearances at school, but the whole 'cool new guy from California' appeal wore off pretty fast. It didn't take long for people to get bored of him once they realized he couldn't so much as drive pretty girls home after school, never mind get himself to a party. Plus with the ridiculously cold Indiana weather, Billy couldn't just walk around with his shirt half undone all the time. (And after his hair froze the one time he walked outside with it wet, he stopped bothering trying to style it before school.) So the 'friends' he had made so quick his first few days in Hawkins started avoiding him. Acting like they hadn't handed him a crown just to yank it away.

Neil's plan to keep Billy as miserable as possible was a raging success.

The real kicker though, the icing on top of the shit month Billy just had is that his stash had run out. Originally it had been a brilliant idea for him to smuggle his own weed in from California. He had shared just enough of it to get people talking about how much better his pot was from theirs, plus it saved him some money. The only problem was that since he had his own he never had to learn who the small-town supplier was. And thanks to his rapid social decline Billy wasn't thrilled at the prospect of looking like some idiot kid asking around for drugs.

He briefly debated going through Max's room to see if she had any, but then he figured she would probably be too much of a goody toe shoes for that. Plus it wasn't worth the risk of getting caught sorting through her underwear drawer (gross).

Still, there was no way in hell Billy was going to survive any of this sober.

Billy pulls up the arcade, music playing too loud. He knows it's

obnoxious, but he's only allowed to use the car *he pays for* when he carts Max around so pissing her off with loud music is the least he can do. Max doesn't wait for him to put the car in park before she is flying out of the car towards the arcade's entrance. Normally Billy would have just peeled right back out of the parking lot but he spots a familiar BMW pull up to the curb behind him.

He hasn't spoken to Steve since that night. He was still pissed at him for lying about Max, and any time he looked at his stupid face he just wanted to punch it more. It was easier to just ignore him.

Billy watches as the Byers kid and Sinclair climb out of the back seat and head inside. The curly-headed kid (Devon? Derek? Something like that) is sitting in Harringtons' passenger seat and the two are talking excitedly back and forth. He still thinks it's weird that Harringtons' only friends seem to be 14-year-olds. It kind of screams pedophile. No wonder he lost his title as king Steve.

Another part of Billy, the part he prominently ignores, is jealous that Steve has friends at all. As he watches them from his rearview mirror he can't think of a time he's ever been so enthralled in a conversation with someone. He was always putting on some kind of act when he talked to people. So worried about keeping up images he would never let himself get lost in a conversation. He can't even think of a topic he could get lost in.

He puts the car into park and climbs out before he can change his mind. It's freezing outside but Billy refuses to buy a winter coat. A coat means acknowledging he is here. That this is permanent. He walks over to Harringtons' car and knocks on the driver's window. He spots the two of them looking over, but Harrington doesn't roll down the window right away. In fact, he just ignores Billy and goes back to talking. Annoyed Billy knocks again, harder this time. It's freezing out here and Steve has the audacity to ignore him? Steve doesn't even look over this time, just extends his arm back towards the window and gracefully presses his middle finger to the glass as he continues talking to his little freak. Who Billy can clearly see laughing at him.

Pissed off now, Billy knocks again, before firmly crossing his arms, trying to hide his skin from the cold. He watches as Harrington tenses up, before reaching over and rolling the window down. Billy can't help but grin. He won.

"Man, what the hell do you want?" Harrington asked him, sounding unimpressed.

Billy leans down slightly to get a better look inside the car. He makes eye contact with Curly Q. "The adults are talking, kid, scram."

"I'm not going anywhere!" He screeched back, glaring at Billy.

Harrington sighed. "Dustin, it's fine, go inside, I'll pick you guys up at 4." Right, his name was Dustin.

"But Steve!-"

"Dude it's fine I promise. Just go."

Dustin looked back over at Billy "If anything happens to him-"

Billy waved him off "Yeah, yeah, You'll kill me." He rolled his eyes.

He can tell the kid wants to say more but Steve is motioning for him to go. After a moment more of hesitation Dustin climbs out and the two are left alone. Finally.

"What do you want Hargrove?"

Now that he's here, Billy feels even stupider. But then again Harrington must have a dealer, he is a pothead if he's ever seen one. So what if he looks stupid asking. It's not like Harrington has anyone to gossip to.

"You know where I can get pot in this bum fuck town of yours?"

Steve doesn't respond right away. He just stares up at Billy, as the second's tick by he gets more and more uncomfortable, and then, suddenly Steve is laughing. At him. "Are you serious? You're asking me a favor?" he laughed harder.

Billy felt his face get hot. "Shut Up man. Do you know where I can get some or not?"

"Why the hell would I tell you?"

“Cause you owe me.” He huffed.

“I owe you!?” Harrington laughed again “How the hell do I owe you?”

“Cause I didn’t rat you out for doing weird shit with my kid sister in the woods.”

“Rat me out?” He raised an eyebrow “To who exactly. The chief of police knew we were there.” That is new information to Billy. Information that definitely does not make that night any better. He is seriously starting to think Max joined a cult.

“You are the chief of police hang out with 14-year-olds at night?”

Harrington just rolled his eyes. “You really think I’m going to do you any favors after what you did to my face? Just ask Tommy.”

“I don’t hang out with Tommy anymore.” Billy begrudgingly admitted.

He sees Harrington smirk. “Oh that’s right, King Billy lost the crown after what a week?” He laughed “You gave me so much shit but I ran this town till I decided I didn’t want to anymore.”

Billy wants to reach over and rank Harrington out the window. “Fuck off man, you could have just said no.” He’s about to leave but Harrington speaks up again.

“The boy’s bathroom in the music hall, during third period a kid named Gunther hangs out in one of the stalls.”

Billy looks back at him and frowns. “It’s Saturday.”

“Uh-huh.”

“There’s nowhere to get pot in this hick town on the weekend?”

“Of course there is.”

Billy started at him, waiting for an elaboration but none came. “Fuck you, Harrington.” He huffed turning back towards his car.

“Your welcome!” Steve yelled out the window after him.

6. Pen Pals and Oregano

Notes for the Chapter:

Mentions of suicidal thoughts

The hallway was empty, the bell had rung a few minutes prior. Billy had a physics test this period that he really couldn't afford to miss, not that that was stopping him. Or making him move any faster as he stood in front of the bathroom door Harrington had told him to go to. He could not help the gnawing feeling that this was a trap. That somehow, he would open the door and Harrington would be on the other side ready to humiliate Billy in some way. The promise of weed on the other side was a strong pull though, so he swallowed down any nerves he had and pushed the door open.

At first glance, the bathroom seemed empty and a jolt of anger shot through Billy. Of course, Harrington was messing with him. Just as he was about to storm back out of the bathroom, he caught a shadow moving under the handicap stall. "... Gunther?"

For a second there was no response and then the sound of the stall lock moving over, and the door was pushed open. "Not out in the open." a deep voice said from inside the stall. With a frown, Billy walked into the stall. Billy did not recognize Gunther which he thought was weird since like a total of 50 kids seemed to live in Hawkins.

"I heard you're selling," Billy said shoving his hands in his pockets.

Gunther nodded. "How much are you looking to buy?" he pulled his backpack into his lap taking a seat on the toilet.

“An ⅛?” Billy shrugged; he didn’t have that much disposable income.

Gunther nodded, taking out a baggy. “\$15,” Gunther said. Billy knitted his eyebrows together looking at the bag.

“That seems a little steep don’t you think.”

“Take it or leave it man the price is \$15.”

Grumbling Billy reached for his wallet. “Whatever.” He had already come this far; he wasn’t backing out now. “I’ll take it.” He pulled out a 10 and a 5 handing it over. Gunther took the cash and tossed the baggy at Billy’s chest.

“Pleasure doing business with you,” Gunther said, pulling out a wade of cash to add Billy’s bills too. He couldn’t help but feel a twinge of jealousy when he saw it. If he had that amount of cash, he could get back to California and away from his dad. He shoved the weed into his pocket and left the bathroom, deciding to just ditch class and go out to his car. Consequences be damned, not like his Dad could take anything else away from him.

He didn’t so much as see another soul between the bathroom and the parking lot. Feeling a little more confident with his decision he jogged over to his car and climbed in, not giving it a second thought before starting it up and peeling out of the parking lot. Despite it being the middle of winter, he rolled down his window and let the

cold air hit him in the face as he drove 15 above the speed limit. Without looking down he reached over and turned his radio up to max volume. It was already set to the only rock station in Hawkins.

“Give your free will a chance, you’ve got to want to succeed, owner of a lonely heart, owner of a lonely heart.” Normally Yes would have been way too mainstream for Billy to listen to but right now the lyrics seemed a little too on the nose to bother about fiddling with the radio, so he let it play.

He hadn’t planned on stopping anywhere, was just going to drive until school got out and he had to go back and get Max. Planned on letting the wind and the music drown out any thoughts in his head. But his brain would not shut up, would not drop the act for a second. Just kept pushing thoughts he did not want to think over the music and the wind. Louder than anything else around him. So, Billy found himself slamming on the breaks, hands gripping the wheel so hard his knuckles turned white. And he let out a scream.

“ASSHOLE!” he slammed his palms on the steering wheel “ASSHOLE, ASSHOLE, ASSHOLE!” He punctuated each scream with a slap to the wheel as he yelled at himself. “GAH!” He pressed his hand into the horn, laying on it as he screamed so loud his throat started to hurt. “I HATE YOU! I FUCKING HATE YOU!” He pulled his hand off the wheel and put the car in park, before climbing out and walking away, not caring as he left the Camaro running on the side of the road. He started walking, still yelling at himself. “NO ONE CARES, NO ONE!” He started laughing, throwing his hands in the air. “No one cares” He continued to laugh though it felt more like crying. “No one cares you stupid attention-seeking ASSHOLE!” Even he was shocked as his own hand hit him across the face. Then it did it again. And again. And again. Till he was slapping and tugging at his hair, trying to feel something. “Asshole, asshole, asshole.” He nearly tripped on a small rock in his way and out of frustration he kicked it. His tantrum came to an abrupt stop as he watched the rock go soaring. He watched eyes

wide as the rock flew out off the edge of a cliff.

Billy took a deep breath looking around. Somehow, he had got himself to the top of the quarry right near the cliff that he had heard everyone thought the Byers kid had fallen off of last year. He kicked another rock; this one too went soaring over the edge and lost forever down into the water below. Billy balled his hands into fists by his side and carefully moved closer to the edge, peeking over. It was a long way down. Much longer than the bridge Billy had planned to throw himself off. It would definitely kill him. He licked his lips and slowly, carefully lifted one foot holding it over the edge. "No one cares." He whispered to himself. He dropped his foot back onto the ground.

With a shaky breath, he took a step back from the edge and then another. For a second he debated taking a running start before flinging himself off the edge. Imagined what it would feel like to fall. It would probably be a lot like driving with the wind in his face... right up until he hit the water. "Just do it." He whispered, begged himself. But his feet would not work. Wouldn't carry him the last five feet he needed to be free. His dad was right, he was nothing but a pussy. Shoving his hands into his pockets he marched back down to the still running Camaro and climbed in, slamming his door closed.

He took a minute to calm down, leaning back in the seat and closing his eyes. Why couldn't he just do it? He didn't want to be alive anymore. He didn't want to do this anymore. Did not want to feel like this. But he still couldn't bring himself to take that final step and it just made him hate himself all the more. Opening his eyes Billy saw his bag sitting on the passenger's seat and not thinking about it he reached over and pulled a notebook and a pen out of it. He flipped to a blank page and started writing. He just needed to get this out. Somehow.

Dear Asshole Billy,

I hate being angry all the time. I am so tired. I'm just pretending to be someone I'm not and

I don't want to be here anymore. I want to be somewhere that I feel like I belong, but I don't even know who I am. I don't even have any friends for fuck sake. I'm so pathetic I have to write this letter to you. I want to be better. Where do I even start? How do you improve something that wasn't even good, to begin with? It would have been easier if I weren't born. I doubt anyone would miss me. I know no one would miss me. I'm so tired of being like this. Is it ever gonna stop?

I don't know why I'm asking. It's not like you have the answer.

Billy stopped writing, staring at the note. It was more scribbles than it was actual words. Frustrated, he ripped it out of his notebook and crumpled it up, throwing it onto the floor. He tossed his stuff back into his school bag and headed back to the school. Instead of going back in to deal with the rest of the day he just pushed his car seat back and decided to take a nap until school let out.

He must have fallen asleep deeper than he anticipated because the next thing he knows he wakes up to someone tapping at his window. Annoyed Billy opens his eyes fully expecting a teacher to be standing there. Instead, he spots Harrington peeking into his window. When he sees Billy open his eyes, he motions for him to roll the window down.

Slowly Billy adjusted his seat back to the upright position, noticing that the parking lot is full of students leaving for the day. Harrington knocks on his window again and annoyed Billy starts the Camaro up so he can roll the window down.

“What is it, Harrington?”

The older boy sighed, sounding annoyed. “I heard you went to see Gunther today.”

“Yeah so?” Billy frowned wondering how Steve even heard about that. No one had been around.

Harrington hesitated like he was deciding maybe it was better not to continue. “Did you smoke what he gave you?”

“Why the fuck do you care if I smoked or not?”

Harrington just groaned. “Look man, Gunther doesn’t sell actual pot okay? He sells Oregano to freshmen.”

Oh.

Well, now Billy is pissed. “What?” He snapped a hand going to his pocket to fish out the baggy Gunther had given him.

Harrington flinched. “Look man I didn’t think you would actually go to him. Look I just-” He sighed and reached into his pocket, before looking around like he wanted to see if anyone was watching them. Then he pulled out a blunt and quickly moved to shove it into Billy's

hand. “We good?”

Billy looked down to stare at the blunt. It definitely was not worth the 15 bucks he had chalked over for fucking oregano. “Fuck you, Harrington.”

“I didn’t think you would actually go to him,” Steve repeated himself.

Billy opened his mouth to respond. Planning on cursing him out.

“Steve?” Max’s voice cut him off. She clearly sounded confused. Both boys looked over to the passenger side of the car where Max was standing. Her eyebrows knitted together as she looked between them. “What’s going on?”

Steve gave her an easy smile. “Nothing Max just had to ask Billy something.”

“...Okay.” She did not sound convinced. Eyes falling to Billy accusingly.

Billy just shrugged in response.

“I’ll see you tonight when I drop Dustin off for D&D yeah?”

“...Yeah...” Max still didn’t sound convinced.

“Bye.” Steve said quickly, walking off.

Max yanked the car door open dropping into the seat next to him. “I told you to leave my friends alone.”

“And I told you an 18-year-old is not your friend.” Billy huffed. “Besides, he was bothering me. Not the other way around.”

Max crossed her arms. “Dustin told me you cornered Steve at the arcade.”

“Hardly call that cornering him.” He huffed.

Max slid down in her seat and Billy pulled the car out of his parking spot, not noticing as Max picked up his discarded note from earlier. They were a mile down the road before Billy even knew she had seen it.

“What is this?” Max’s voice cut through the silence of the car. Billy glanced over to see what she meant, and his blood ran cold. Fuck. No. No. This couldn’t be happening again. He tried to grab it out of her hand, but she pulled it away.

“That’s none of your fucking business Maxine!” He tried to grab it again.

“Bullshit!” She yelled at him. “You tried it again didn’t you!” He had to think of an excuse quick before they got home, and she tattled on him again.

“Jesus! No!”

“Then what is this huh!?”

“It’s fucking-” Billy panicked “Steve’s! It’s Steve’s.”

Max looked at him like he was crazy. “Steve wrote this?” She clearly didn’t believe him.

Internally Billy cursed himself for being so stupid. But it was too late to back out now. “Yeah.”

“Why would Steve write you a letter.”

“... We are friends.” Billy lied. “That’s why he was at my car.”

“You two are not friends.” She said, calling his bluff.

“Yeah, we are.” He insisted. “We are um pen pals.”

“Pen pals?” She repeated.

“Yeah.” God this was the worst lie. “That’s why you’ve never seen us hanging out.”

Max stared at him. It was very clear she didn’t believe him. “Then I guess he will know all about this letter when I show it to him.”

“You can’t show it to him.”

“Why not.”

“It’s personal. Only I was supposed to see it.” Which that part wasn’t a lie.

“I don’t believe you.” Max announced, “Steve is way too cool to be friends with you.”

Billy groaned. “Fine! Go ahead and ask him about the letter. I’m not lying.”

“Fine.” She said shoving the letter into her bag. “I’ll ask him tonight.”

“Great. Perfect.” Billy said. He had exactly three hours to figure out

how to get out of this lie and get that letter back before Max opened her big mouth to Susan and Neil. No pressure.

7. Deal with the devil

Notes for the Chapter:

From Steves Perspective

As much as Steve enjoyed hanging out with Dustin and the other kids a three-hour Dungeon and Dragons session wasn't exactly his idea of a fun night. Especially when that session was being hosted in his ex-girlfriend's basement. So he made up some imaginary date to Dustin after getting hounded about staying. In reality, he was planning a very unromantic night of sitting alone and working on a college essay. (After getting rejected from three different schools the guidance counselor suggested he start from scratch.)

In all honesty, he should have already driven off. Dustin had already run inside and left Steve on his own. The only reason he hadn't was because well Jonathan's car was parked in the Wheelers driveway. It shouldn't have thrown him off. If nothing else Jonathan would have been here to drop off Will for D&D. But it was still surreal to see the car just parked there like it belonged. So instead of driving home, Steve was idling on the side of the road hating himself and imagining what Nancy and Jonathan were doing inside the house. He was so caught up in his self-deprecating daydream he barely registered the car pulling up behind him. Only tearing his eyes away from Ford when he heard his passenger's door open.

Steve looked over just as Billy Hargrove dropped himself into the passenger seat looking slightly frantic. Mentally cursing himself Steve opened his mouth to try and rectify the situation. He figured Billy was probably still pissed about the whole oregano situation and knowing the dude's temper he was here to smash Steve's face in again. Which was completely uncool of him because Steve did give him a blunt from his own stash.

“Hargrove I’m not in the mood to fi-”

“Shut Up.” Hargrove cut Steve off glancing behind them towards his own car. “If Max asks, we are friends.”

“What?”

“We are fucking pen pals or whatever okay?”

“Wha- pen pals?” Steves knitted his eyebrows together trying to make sense of this.

Hargrove groaned in frustration as if Steve was the one making no sense here. “I’ll fucking owe you okay Harrington now can you do that or not?”

Steve really wanted to point out that this was hardly the polite way of asking someone for a favor. Unfortunately, he was cut off by his back door opening and Max sliding into the back seat. As Steve turned to greet her he had the brief thought that if the step-siblings decided to become hitmen this would be a pretty intimidating way to kill someone.

“Hey, Max.” Steve smiled at her.

Max did not smile back. Instead, she held out a sheet of notebook paper. “Did you write this?” Steve can hear Hargrove's sharp intake

of breath. Carefully he takes the paper from Max and reads it over. Then he reads it again.

He still has no idea what is going on but he can understand why Hargrove doesn't want Max thinking he wrote this. It's ... depressing. A year ago Steve probably would have made fun of someone for writing something like this. But the really depressing part is that Steve can kind of relate to the contents. He pulls his eyes from the page to look over at Hargrove only to find the younger teen very pointedly avoiding looking at Steve and instead focusing on his fingernails with a clenched jaw.

Taking a deep breath Steve turned back to Max. He really didn't want to admit this letter was his. His life was already pathetic enough, but he was trying to be a better person. "Yeah uh, I wrote this."

He can feel when Hargrove's eyes flick up to him and between that and the stare Max is giving him he feels like the combined attention might make his head explode. These two are definitions of 'if looks could kill'.

"I mean Who addresses a letter to themselves?" Steve laughed awkwardly trying to break the tension.

Max frowned and turned to stare Billy down. Hargrove cleared his throat. "I told you so." He shrugged and leaned back, acting all casual. Steve could tell he was still on edge though. "Can you fuck off now?"

Max huffed and went to take the paperback from Steve who was going to give it to her, but Hargrove beat them both to it. Snatching the paper from Steve's hand and crumbling it up as he shoved it into

his jean pocket.

“Go bother your little nerd friends Maxine.”

“I still don’t believe you.”

“Jesus I don’t care.”

Steve shuffled awkwardly in his seat. He never was great at confrontation. “Um Max The party is waiting for you.”

Max glared at him, but grabbed the door handle. “If you guys are really friends or pen pals or whatever you’ll have proof right?”

“Um, sure?”

“Good,” Max said and got out of the car, slamming the door closed a little harder than Steve thought was necessary.

Steve looked over at Billy, who was watching Max go inside. “Look man I don’t even want to know okay. Just your welcome or whatever.” He really just wanted to leave whatever drama this was and go home, get drunk and write a college essay.

Billy looked over at him. “Max isn’t going to drop this.”

Steve blinked unsure how to respond. "... So I have a date..." He lied just wanting Hargrove to get out.

"You have to keep pretending to be my friend till she backs off."

"What?" Steve shook his head "No way, just tell her you wrote the note. I mean sure it's a little..." he gestured vaguely "But I don't see what the big deal is."

Steve didn't miss the way that Billy's fist clenched at his side. "You're failing like everything right?"

"Okay," Steve sighed cause what the fuck "Get out of my car."

"If you do this for me, I will do your homework for the rest of the year."

"Why would I want that? It's not like you could do a better job than me. Plus you're a grade below me you have no idea what's going on."

"I'm in the same honors classes as your prissy ex-girlfriend." Billy sneered at him. "And word on the street is you've gotten rejected from every school you've applied to so far. I know you could use the grade boost."

“How did you hear-”

Billy waved him off “Not important. So are you going to help me or not?”

Steve narrowed his eyes at him. “... I need help with my college essay too.”

Hargrove groaned “Yeah sure fine whatever I’ll write your essay too.”

“I don’t want you to write it for me just... edit it or whatever.” “So we have a deal?”

Steve sighed. He was going to need a really strong drink. “Yeah, we have a deal.”

Notes for the Chapter:

This is by far my least favorite fic in terms of my writing ability. I may just scrap this whole thing and start again cause I do love the idea

8. Man With a Plan

Notes for the Chapter:

So I reread this and was annoyed I had to write more in order you know keep reading. So here is the next chapter sorry it took a year

Billy has a tendency to think too much. He thinks about how he dresses. Thinks about how he walks. Thinks about what to say and how to say it. He practices conversations in his head. In the mirror. Comes up with scripts for every situation. Scripts for his dad. For Susan. For the pizza delivery guy. For his teachers. His “friends.” Definitely for the girls he’s trying to hook up with. Typically, people respond with the lines he’s given them in his head. Or at least some variation of them.

He can’t stand people that go off-script. People like Max. People like Steve Harrington.

His thumb flipped the top of his cigarette carton back and closed, a single one left. He wanted to light up but after the whole weed fiasco he had to ration his cash if he didn’t want to be without pot and nicotine at the same time. This carton was supposed to last him the week, but after last night’s conversation with Harrington he’d gone home and attempted to chain smoke the anxiety away.

He watched as students filed past his car towards the front doors of Hawkins High. This was such a stupid idea. There was nothing stopping Harrington from telling the entire school about his stupid letter. He hated that he was so weak. He never should have written it in the first place. The only thing that getting upset ever did was cause more trouble for himself.

Billy squeezed his eyes closed and tried to imagine what it would be like to just jump. Probably fucking cold. He could practically feel the gust of wind blow past him, stinging his ears.

“I’ve been thinking about your idea.”

Billy jumped, his eyes flying open, as Harrington closed the passenger door. "Jesus."

Harrington smirked. "Now you know what it's like to get ambushed in your own car."

Shoving his pack of cigarettes into his pocket, Billy turned to face him. From the corner of his eye, he noticed a group of girls stop and point through his windshield at them. "What are you doing?"

"Discussing our plan. Unless you've decided to just tell Max the letter is yours."

He sneered, drumming his thumb on the steering wheel. "No. I didn't tell her that."

"Great so-" He gestured at him "What's the plan?"

Billy reached into the back seat, grabbing his backpack pulling out a fresh notebook. "We fill this up with some fake letters. Just say it was a class assignment and you enjoyed my charm so much you begged me to be your friend."

"You do know Max has met you right? She knows exactly how charming you are."

"Says the guy who lost his girlfriend to Byers."

"Says the guy who hasn't been on a date since Halloween."

His nostrils flared in anger. "Fuck off. My dad's had me on lock down since Max decided to run off. I could get more bitches than you any day of the week."

"You know I've found that girls like you a lot more if you don't call them bitches."

Billy was sure he'd be able to drive off a cliff if Harrington was in the passenger's seat. "You got a better suggestion for how we became fucking pen pals?"

He rolled his eyes. "When do you want to meet to write the letters?"

"After school? Your place." There was no way he was letting Harrington into his house. And he highly doubted either of them wanted to be seen in public more than necessary. Besides he was still grounded, it was better if word didn't come back to Neil that he was breaking curfew to run around with some guy.

"Thought you were on lock down."

"My dad works until 5."

"You know it would be more convincing that we are friends if people see us together."

"Sounds like you want people to think you have friends that aren't 13."

"I'm the one doing you a favor man." Harrington sat back flipping through the empty notebook.

"Don't act like you're not getting a lot out of this arrangement. I swear if you tell anyone what you read in that letter it's bye bye college essay."

"I'm not going to tell anyone about the letter Hargrove relax."

Billy wanted to scream at him. How was he expected to relax when his rival had seen all of Billy's guts laid bare onto that paper? It was humiliating. And now his entire life depended on fucking Harrington keeping a secret for him. Stupid Max and her stupid snooping.

"Why did you write that letter anyway?"

Billy reached across Harrington opening his door. "Get out."

"Jesus' man, if anyone is going to believe the letter is mine, I should at least know why *I* wrote it."

"Use your imagination."

Billy was not having this conversation. He was doing this specifically to avoid this damn conversation. He didn't even know what he was supposed to say. He'd been trying to figure out himself why he'd

written the letter. It just happened. It was something his mom taught him to do when he got angry. His mom used to scribble her thoughts down into pages she kept hidden inside cookbooks. He guessed she didn't want his dad finding them either. Billy had looked for them after she left. After she stopped picking up. It surprised him how fast you could forget someone's voice and he didn't want to forget her handwriting too.

She didn't have time to take him. But she had time to pull the pages from her cookbooks and take them with her.

He'd stopped writing after that and let his fists express how he was feeling instead. It was usually less trouble to just knock the sense out of the closest person anyway.

He flexed his hand. He really wanted to punch something right now.

Fuck it. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his last cigarette. He would steal some from Susan if he had to.

Steve climbed out of the car. "I told Dustin I would give him a ride to the arcade after school. So come over around 2:30."

Billy lit up as the door slammed closed.